

Old Testament lesson – Deuteronomy 6:1-12

New Testament lesson – John 10:22-42

Multiple Choice Quiz

When I was teaching, like most teachers I gave tests and quizzes. On most tests, I included some multiple choice questions. It was interesting to discover some of the misconceptions students had about multiple choice questions.

For example, most students thought multiple choice questions would be easier than problem questions where they would have to do some calculations. But I found banks of test questions that included lots of multiple choice questions that required calculations.

Often times, these particular questions were even trickier than regular problem questions. First, there was no space where a student could show their work, which meant there was the possibility of partial credit. When doing a calculation, a student might reach a point where they made a mistake and found a wrong answer. I would give some credit up to the point where they made the mistake.

What made these test bank questions even more diabolical was that the authors knew where students were likely to make a mistake, and what answer would result from that mistake. They always included that answer in the choices. So when a student found their wrong answer among the choices, they assumed they had done the problem correctly.

Another misconception students have about multiple choice questions is that if one of the answers is “none of the above” or “all of the above,” that is the correct answer. I used to love to include one of those as a *wrong* answer on a multiple

choice question, just to see how many students would pick it. Most of them quickly learned to be more careful before choosing that as their answer.

On Easter I mentioned once again the misconceptions the disciples had about what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. In the NT lesson this morning we encounter similar misconceptions about the Messiah, but held by the Jewish leaders. As usual, John refers to the Jewish leaders as simply “the Jews.” This group probably included members of the Sanhedrin – Sadducees, priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They were likely a group of men with mixed motives when they surrounded him and asked him their questions.

Some of them probably hoped he was the Messiah, but they had the same idea about the Messiah that the disciples had. He would use the power of God to expel the Romans and reclaim the Promised Land for God’s people.

For those men, this was an especially appropriate occasion for the Messiah to do that. The Feast of Dedication refers to something that happened almost 200 years prior to our lesson. At that time, the land of Israel was controlled by a Syrian royal family known as the Seleucids. They were powerful proponents of Greek culture, which they imposed on the inhabitants of Israel.

Greek culture was tremendously popular throughout the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East as a result of Alexander the Great’s conquests.

Some Jews were fine with what was known as “Hellenization.” But when a Seleucid leader named Antiochus Epiphanes dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem to the Greek God Zeus, that was too much for the more faithful Jews. There was a revolt, led by Judas Maccabeus, and the Seleucids were thrown out. The Temple was cleansed and rededicated to the LORD. That rededication was celebrated in the Feast of Dedication mentioned in our NT lesson. Today, it is called Hanukkah.

You can see, then, why this seemed like an especially appropriate time for the Messiah to reveal himself. For those who were hoping that Jesus might actually be the Messiah, a little bit of *deja vu* all over again would be quite welcome.

On the other hand, there were no doubt some Jewish leaders who simply wanted to expose this uneducated preacher as a fraud, and so deprive him of his crowd support. They were laboring under one of the misconceptions that many people have about Jesus. And so we come to a little quiz: *

Those who thought Jesus was the Messiah would answer “A” or “B” or maybe both. Those who thought Jesus was not the Messiah would answer “C” or “D.” Their divided opinions are on display in the verses immediately preceding our lesson.

In his response, Jesus implies that he has already indicated to them that he is God’s Anointed One, by both words and deeds. He then tells them why they don’t believe him: they are not part of his flock.

His sheep recognize his voice, and they follow him. They don’t ask foolish questions about who he is. They recognize that he is their shepherd. He grants them eternal life, and no one can take them from him.

Now, what sort of shepherd, no matter how great a teacher or prophet he might be – what sort of shepherd would claim to grant eternal life to his sheep? And then, just to be sure there is no mistake about what he is saying in regard to himself, Jesus really triggers these leaders: “I and the Father are one.”

Well, that tears it for these Jewish leaders. It’s time to stone this blasphemer. But Jesus answers them with a quote from Psalm 82, and he points out that his works alone should be enough to make them believe.

Our OT lesson is the basic source for the Jewish leaders’ anger. It is the most fundamental Jewish belief about God, followed by the basic commandment that forms the basis for obeying all the other Commandments of the Law. The first half of Deuteronomy 6:4 is a prayer recited by all practicing Jews, known as the Shema: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד: (shmah yee-srah-ayl ah-doh-noi eh-loh-hay-noo ah-doh-noi eh-khahd) The full version of the prayer includes the rest of our lesson as well.

God is one, and that one is different and separate from us. Unlike virtually every other god of ancient times, he has no form. He is not human, nor does he have a human-like form as did the Greek and Roman gods, even Zeus who was cast

out of the temple, the event being commemorated in the Feast of Dedication. Obviously, Jesus was speaking blasphemy.

Except, he was not. This was not the time for him to prove that to them, but neither was it the time for him to be seized by them. When it was finally time for him to be seized and handed over, it would also be time for him to prove his identity by laying down his life voluntarily, and then receiving it back from the Father in the Resurrection.

As I did a little background reading for this sermon, I came across an exposition on the Great Commandment which follows the Shema. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” This particular comment pointed out that it is difficult to love on command because we can not simply command ourselves to feel a certain way. And that is true.

Fortunately, such a statement reflects another misconception: love is a feeling, and only a feeling. Love is indeed a feeling, and a very powerful one at that. There is no better day than Mother’s Day to make that statement and be confident that no one will argue against it. A mother’s love is a very powerful feeling, and the defense of a mother for her child is something you don’t want to be on the receiving end of.

But the love commanded again and again in the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, is not a mere feeling. It is a way of living, acting, behaving. Look at

the passage that follows this commandment; it’s full of action verbs – teach, talk, walk, lie down, rise, bind, write. At all these times, a Jew is to remember the words of God’s commandments. This commandment is not about feeling a certain way. It is about living a certain way, with God as the most important part of your life, and passing that along to each successive generation.

Jesus spoke about his sheep following him. Like the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, and might, following Jesus involves actions far more than feeling. And so we come to another multiple choice quiz: ** I’ll give you a minute or so to think about your answer; think carefully. I used to be known for trick questions.

Now – once you have figured out your answer, did you answer based on the way you actually follow Jesus now? Or did you pick the answer you know is supposed to be correct? That answer is G, of course. All of those activities are a necessary part of truly following Jesus. Not many people do a really good job of performing all of those necessary activities; that’s why we must be saved by God’s grace.

But no one wants to be a hypocrite and say, “I’m a Christian; I follow Jesus,” if we don’t at least try to do those things. All of them are commanded by Jesus at one place or another in the gospels, either by word or by example. They are all reinforced in other parts of the NT.

People have all sorts of misconceptions about this particular

question. For example, you have probably heard someone say they prefer to worship God outdoors, where they feel close to nature. All well and good, but that's not enough, if we are to learn anything from the example of Jesus.

If ever there was someone who could feel close to God outdoors, away from people, it was Jesus. And he frequently did exactly that. He withdrew from people and went off by himself to pray and have some time with his Father.

But what else do we know about Jesus? Luke tells us in chapter 4 it was his *custom* to be at a synagogue, every Sabbath. How often do you suppose Jesus missed a Sabbath day worship service? You could probably count them on one hand and have five fingers left. How can we be so arrogant to think we have less need to attend worship than Jesus?

We often hesitate to discuss religion with people. We don't tell others about Jesus, preferring to think we can bring them to Christ by the way we live. The apostles did miracles of healing, and yet they believed it was necessary to speak about Jesus to people in order for them to believe.

When was the last time any of us performed a miracle of healing? When was the last time we told a lame man to rise up and walk, and he did so? I've never done that. If you have, we need to have a serious discussion about scheduling some healing services. And I mean that seriously. If you have ever prayed for someone and seen them healed when you prayed, you may have a

spiritual gift in that area, and we need to let God work through you to do more of it. It does still happen.

Even so, people will need to *hear* about Jesus. As Paul wrote in Romans, "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." Another way to translate the last part of that verse is "the word of God." Someone has to speak the word of God about Jesus in order for another person to believe in the gospel. It's not going to happen because we try to live a good life. None of us – no, *not one of us* – is that good. If we don't *speak* to others about Jesus, or at least invite them to worship, they probably will never have a reason to believe.

One of the answers offered on the quiz is also a dangerous misconception. People think that being saved by grace through faith means we only have to believe. Maybe that applies in the case of someone who suddenly realizes, just moments before they die, that Jesus really is the Son of God and our sins are forgiven through his death on the cross. But if we have faith in Jesus, it means we trust him. It means we want to obey that commandment to love God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our might. Having faith in Jesus means we will want to display our faith in the things we do and the things we say to others.

We all know that life is full of choices, one might even say multiple choices. We have to beware of misconceptions that might lead us astray to wrong answers –

wrong beliefs, wrong living, wrong decisions.

Choose wisely what you believe about Jesus. Choose wisely how you follow

him. If we truly love the LORD our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might, we will be on our way to passing the quiz. Amen.

*Jesus was ____.

- A. a good man who was a great teacher
- B. a prophet of God
- C. a lunatic who mistakenly thought he was divine
- D. a liar who claimed to be divine, but knew he was not
- E. the Son of God, God in human form

** A necessary activity to follow Jesus is:

- A. worshiping God, alone and with others
- B. prayer
- C. Bible reading/study
- D. fellowship with other Christians
- E. service to God and to others
- F. telling others about Jesus
- G. all of the above
- H. none of the above; just believe in Jesus
- I. A and B are enough
- J. A, B, C, and D are enough